Shared Reading: “O Captain! My Captain!” by Walt Whitman

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| **Day** | **Content** | **Structure** |
| 1 | * Previewing and setting a purpose for reading * Teaching point: extended metaphor | * This week we are going to be looking at a poem by a very famous American poet, Walt Whitman. This is a poem that Walt Whitman wrote after Abraham Lincoln—the president who was in office during the Civil War—was assassinated, or killed. * Now, the poem is called O President! My President. And the poem doesn’t include the words “Abraham Lincoln” or “Civil War.” * Instead, Walt Whitman tells us, as readers, about Abraham Lincoln and about the Civil War through an extended metaphor. * What’s a metaphor? (when we describe one thing by calling it another thing…for example, “Her eyes were two blue oceans.” Her eyes weren’t *really* oceans, but this tells me that they were big, and blue, and maybe shining like the ocean. Or “After walking in the snow for an hour, my toes were ice cubes!”) * In this poem, Whitman uses an extended metaphor—that means he uses the same comparison for the entire poem. * In this poem, Whitman writes about a ship’s Captain—and that represents Lincoln. The ship is the US, and the storm is the Civil War. * Knowing that, listen while I read the poem. What do you think Whitman might be telling us about Lincoln or about the war, based on this poem? * Read poem. * Ask for responses. * Choral read poem to close. |
| 2 | * Teaching point: Deciphering new and unfamiliar vocabulary | * In this poem, Whitman uses a lot of poetic language and advanced vocabulary. In some parts, Whitman uses words we know in new ways. * In order to understand this poem—and all poetry—we as readers need to pay careful attention to the poet’s word choices. * For example, Whitman writes, “*The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;”* * I know the word weather, but I’m used to seeing it as a noun, not a verb like it is here in this sentence. And rack is a word I know, like a coat rack, but that doesn’t make sense in this context. The end of the sentence says, “the prize we sought—or wanted—is won” so I think that weathering every rack has something to do with doing something challenging to get what you want—the prize. * Read on with a partner. Find a spot where you see a new word—or an old word being used in a new way—and see if you can work together to puzzle through what it might mean. * Listen to partnerships share * Choral read to close. |
| 3 | * Teaching point: re-stating poetry is one way to understand it | * This week, we’ve been looking at a very complicated poem. It’s so complex, lots of people don’t read this poem until they are in college! And even then, it can be confusing. * One way readers of poetry make sense of complicated poems is by restating them in their own words. When we go through a poem and pick out the important ideas, we can re-state them in a simpler way. * Watch while I try to re-state some of the ideas in the first stanza. * “O Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done” *Oh leader/Abe Lincoln, our scary journey is over.* * “The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won.” *We’ve been through something really hard, and gotten what we wanted in the end.* * “The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting” *We’re almost to shore—to home—and I can hear people celebrating.* * What about this next line, “While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring.” How else could we say some of those ideas? * I want you to try, in partnerships, to re-state some of the big ideas in this poem in your own words. You could go line by line, or combine a few lines. * Listen to responses. * Choral read to close. |